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Effects of Gratitude on Fundamental Attribution Error

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Introduction

- **Gratitude journaling** has been gaining traction within recent years as an intervention for mood disorders. (Sansone & Sansone, 2010)
- Prior research shows that emotional states (similar to gratitude) influence decision making (Sachdeva et al., 2009)
- **Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE):** Is a consistent and universal phenomena, where an individual is more likely to attribute a situation to another's personal traits rather than their situation.

Hypotheses

- 1.) Can gratitude journaling reduce an individual's likelihood to commit FAE?
- 2.) Is baseline gratitude trait associated with FAE response?

Method

Participants

- 40 UMW students enrolled in a PSYC 100 course were recruited with the online platform SONA.
- Mean Age = 18.9 years ($SD = 2.26$)
- Predominantly female (75%)
- Predominantly Caucasian (82.5%)

Procedure

- Participants were randomly assigned to either experimental or control group by Qualtrics and completed their surveys in a computer lab on the UMW campus.

Measures & Manipulations

- **GQ-6 Questionnaire:** Higher scores are associated with higher levels of trait gratitude (McCullough et al., 2002)
- **FAE:** We adapted an FAE vignette questionnaire to measure results (Weatherly et al., 1999)
- **Manipulations:** Participants were randomly assigned to either
 - Experimental Group- Gratitude Journaling** (adjusted from Kerr et al., 2015)
 - Control Group- Daily Task Journaling** (Cunha et al., 2019)

Data Analysis

Our results indicate that there was no association between induced or trait gratitude and FAE. We used the GQ-6 measurement to control for third variable error.

- **Hypothesis 1:**
 - No significant difference was found in a propensity to commit FAE between our experimental group ($M = 47.18, SD = 20.78$) and our control group ($M = 51.09, SD = 12.73$) $t(38) = .73, p = .473$.
- **Hypothesis 2:**
 - A bivariate correlation determined that there was no association of baseline trait gratitude and FAE scores within our experimental group ($r = -.32, p = .183$) or our control ($r = -.06, p = .780$).

Discussion

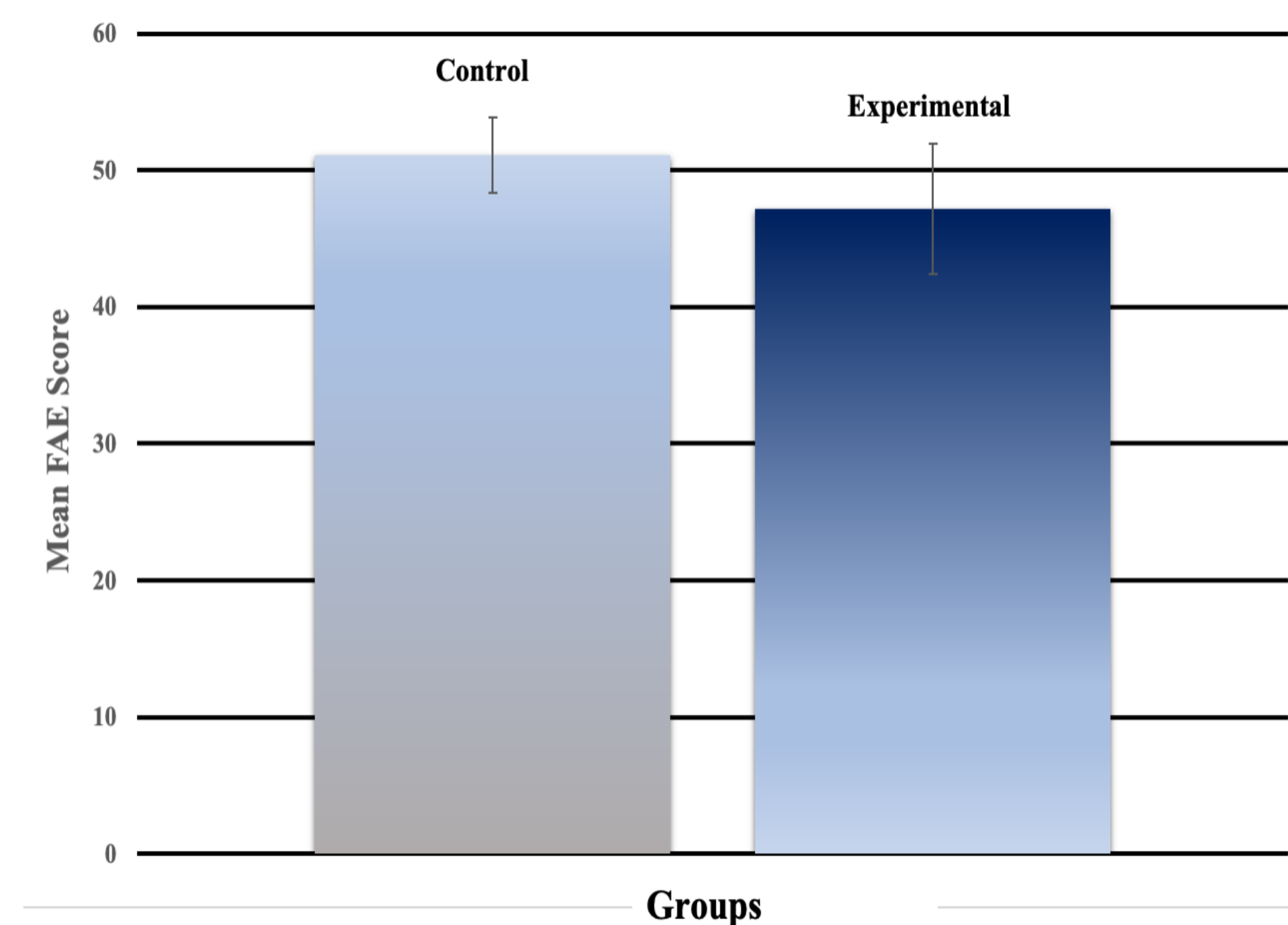
- The current results suggest that neither baseline gratitude trait nor gratitude journaling have a significant effect upon propensity to FAE's. However, both individuals who had lower baseline gratitude, and were in the control group had higher FAE scores than their counterparts.
- These results should be interpreted in the context of several limitations including:
 - **Program Error:** Qualtrics failed to properly record answers of zero for the FAE measure causing several responses to be skewed toward higher FAE scores.
 - **Journaling Error:** Not enough time for the gratitude journaling to take effect. Typical gratitude journaling studies have individuals journal for a week to a month, our study only had participants journal once.
 - **Sample Size:** While not statistically significant, our prediction that baseline gratitude and gratitude journaling would reduce FAE was accurate, suggesting that a larger sample size would have found significant results.
 - **GQ-6 Trait Disposition:** All scores on the GQ-6 questionnaire were extremely high, reducing likelihood of finding a correlation.

Figure

One-Way Analysis of Covariance: Testing FAE propensity between experimental gratitude journaling group and control group, after controlling for baseline gratitude traits.

Figure 1

The Effects of Gratitude on Fundamental Attribution Error



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